

## GUIDELINES FOR COUNSELLORS DURING CORONAVIRUS 19

The fundamental principles, skills and knowledge underpinning counselling - as practiced within the profession and other related fields - holds good at this time but being aware of certain likely common themes and today's context is worth reflecting on, discussing and then taking appropriate action.

**Self-Awareness:** Being self-aware and ensuring our own issues do not adversely affect the counselling process is fundamental to counselling. In the current context the counsellor, like the caller, is also living through the pandemic, having movement restricted and maybe experiencing anxieties – similar or different – to the caller. Being self aware is therefore more important at this time to ensure the clients' needs are being met

**Self-care:** Finding ways of calming self; finding support for our own concerns and avoiding burn-out is likely to be a common need but also maybe one suppressed as feel as a helper should be able to cope and not trouble others given how everyone is facing this issue. Remember we are all human and we – of all people – understand the need for mutual support so we can help others. Invest in yourself. Balance your time helping others with dealing with your own tasks; personal matters and emotions. Peer/individual supervision is more needed not less at this time if we are to be able to sustain our service therefore avoid isolating yourself from the counselling community – let's all feel part of a caring team there for each other as well as others.

**World View:** As individuals we, like others, will frame this pandemic according to our own world view. Remember as counsellors we do not impose our view on others. We may help people consider other ways of reframing if their view is distressing them but as ever we need to be self-aware and be constantly thinking what is helpful to the client. Also what is evidence based. Even if your world view is one of doom or punishment from on High keep to yourself as such judgmental, negative views run counter to the principles of counselling.

**Practical Queries:** Whatever approach you are used to using during counselling it is highly likely that some callers will be anxious about practical matters and may want you to address them. This could range from how to financially survive to whether they or their loved ones are showing signs of the virus. Obviously we cannot become medics or financial advisors however we should know where they can get updated, accurate information and share that with them so they do not feel alone with their worry but have a path to walk on with the appropriate facts and people. There is a lot of false information & myths doing the rounds so we need to tool ourselves so we can counter them. Good sources of information are <http://www.moh.gov.my/index.php> (Ministry of Health), <http://www.nadma.gov.my/> (NADMA Prime Minister's Office) and <http://portalbencana.nadma.gov.my/portal/> (NADMA Sarawak) amongst others.

**Likely Emotional Issues:** We are all expecting anxiety both from the general public and those with pre-existing mental health issues. Watch out also for depression and suicidal thoughts and respond accordingly. Likewise for addictions: those going through enforced withdrawal and those at risk of developing (e.g. on-line gambling).

**Those in Danger:** Be alert to people in lockdown in houses with household members who can be physically and emotionally abusive under normal circumstances and more so when stressed and isolated. There are also the sexual abusers. Children are particularly vulnerable. Be aware of where help is and how it can be accessed. For abuse a good reference is the Women Aid's Organisation (WAO) website ([wao.org.my](http://wao.org.my)) & their TINA help line accepts text & whatsapp messages during the MCO (018988 8058). There is the National Government (Talian Kasih) toll free number on 15999 (whatsapp 019261 5999) and the One Stop Crisis Centre in major general hospitals should still be operating.

Although many local NGOs have had to suspend their usual services you could try to contact those involved with such societies to talk through what could possibly be done under current situation for the person you know – however do not give out any personal phone numbers to the public.

***Let's try to work out through our own networks how to deal with the issues which arise.***

***Together we can learn and work through this.***



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